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The result is a work written unquestionably with great pains, containing a large mass of facts, some of them new, and embodying what are undoubtedly the opinions of a certain class of his countrymen about the great man who ruled France with a vigor and ability never surpassed. We have no fault to find with M. Lanfrey for his conclusions; but we do find great fault with him for the thoroughly one-sided way in which he has written; for his disingenuousness in treating of controverted topics; for his want of generosity when treating of the things that present Napoleon in a favorable light. In our judgment, the work of Sir Walter Scott, with all its faults, and with all its national prejudice, will give one a much more just idea of Napoleon's character than can be got from M. Lanfrey's history.

6. — *The Life of John Milton: narrated in Connection with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of his Time.* By DAVID MASSON, M. D., LL. D., Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature in the University of Edinburgh. Vol. II. 1638–1643. London and New York: Macmillan & Co. 1871. 8vo. pp. xii, 608.

If the biographies of literary men are to assume the bulk which Mr. Masson is giving to that of Milton, their authors should send a phial of *elixir vite* with the first volume, that a purchaser might have some valid assurance of surviving to see the last. Mr. Masson has already occupied thirteen hundred and seventy-eight pages in getting Milton to his thirty-fifth year, and an interval of eleven years stretches between the dates of the first and second instalments of his published labors. As Milton's literary life properly begins at twenty-one with the "Ode on the Nativity," and as by far the more important part of it lies between the year at which we are arrived and his death at the age of sixty-six, we might seem to have the terms given us by which to make a rough reckoning of how soon we are likely to see land. But when we recollect the baffling character of the winds and currents we have already encountered, and the eddies that may at any time slip us back to the reformation in Scotland or the settlement of New England; when we consider, moreover, that Milton's life overlapped the *grand siècle* of French literature, with its irresistible temptations to digression and homily for a man of Mr. Masson's temperament, we may be pardoned if a sigh of doubt and discouragement escape us. We envy the secular leisures of Methusaleh, and are thankful that *his* biography at least (if written in the same longeval proportion) is irrecoverably lost

to us. What a subject would that have been for a person of Mr. Masson's spacious predilections! Even if he himself can count on patriarchal prerogations of existence, let him hang a print of the Countess of Desmond in his study to remind him of the ambushes which Fate lays for the toughest of us. For ourselves, we have not dared to climb a cherry-tree since we began to read his work. Even with the promise of a speedy third volume before us, we feel by no means sure that we shall live to see Mary Powell back in her husband's house; for it is just at this crisis that Mr. Masson, with the diabolical art of a practised serial writer, leaves us while he goes into an exhaustive account of the Westminster Assembly and the political and religious notions of the Massachusetts Puritans. We could not help thinking, after we had got Milton fairly through college, that he was never more mistaken in his life than when he wrote, —

“How soon hath Time, that subtle thief of youth,
Stolen on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!”

Or is it Mr. Masson who has made a blunder?

It is plain from the Preface to the second volume that Mr. Masson himself has an uneasy consciousness that something is wrong, and that Milton ought somehow to be more than a mere incident of his own biography. He tells us that, “whatever may be thought by a hasty person looking in on the subject from the outside, no one can study the life of Milton as it ought to be studied without being obliged to study extensively and intimately the contemporary history of England, and even incidentally of Scotland and Ireland too. . . . Thus on the very compulsion, or at least the suasion, of the biography, a history grew on my hands. It was not in human nature to confine the historical inquiries, once they were in progress, within the precise limits of their demonstrable bearing on the biography, even had it been possible to determine these limits beforehand; and so the history assumed a co-ordinate importance with me, was pursued often for its own sake, and became, though always with a sense of organic relation to the biography, continuous in itself.” If a “hasty person” is one who thinks eleven years rather long to have his button held by a biographer ere he begin his next sentence, we take to ourselves the sting of Mr. Masson's covert sarcasm. We confess with shame a pusillanimity that is apt to flag if a “to be continued” does not redeem its promise before the lapse of a quinquennium. We could scarce await the “Autocrat” himself so long. The heroic age of literature is past, and even the duodecimo is often too heavy (*οἶον νῦν βρότοι*) for the descendants of men to whom the folio was a pastime. But what does Mr. Masson mean by “continuous”? To us it seems rather as if his somewhat rambling history

of the seventeenth century were interrupted now and then by the sudden apparition of Milton, who, like Paul Pry, just pops in and hopes he does not intrude, to tell us what *he* has been doing in the mean while. The reader, immersed in Scottish politics or the schemes of Archbishop Laud, is a little puzzled at first, but reconciles himself on being reminded that this fair-haired young man is the protagonist of the drama.

If Goethe was right in saying that every man was a citizen of his age as well as of his country, there can be no doubt that in order to understand the motives and conduct of the man we must first make ourselves intimate with the time in which he lived. We have therefore no fault to find with the thoroughness of Mr. Masson's "historical inquiries." The more thorough the better, so far as they were essential to the satisfactory performance of his task. But it is only such contemporary events, opinions, or persons as were really operative on the character of the man we are studying that are of consequence, and we are to familiarize ourselves with them, not so much for the sake of explaining them as of understanding him. The biographer, especially of a literary man, need only mark the main currents of tendency, without being officious to trace out to its marshy source every runlet that has cast in its tiny pitcherful with the rest. Much less should he attempt an analysis of the stream and to classify every component by itself, as if each were ever effectual singly and not in combination. Human motives can not be thus chemically cross-examined, nor do we arrive at any true knowledge of character by such minute subdivision of its ingredients. Nothing is so essential to a biographer as an eye that can distinguish at a glance between real events that are the levers of thought and action, and what Donne calls "unconcerning things, matters of fact,"—between substantial personages, whose contact or even neighborhood is influential, and the supernumeraries that serve first to fill up a stage and afterwards the interstices of a biographical dictionary.

"Time hath a wallet at his back
Wherein he puts alms for Oblivion."

Let the biographer keep his fingers off that sacred and merciful deposit, and not renew for us the bores of a former generation as if we had not enough of our own. But if he cannot forbear that unwise inquisitiveness, we may fairly complain when he insists on taking us along with him in the processes of his investigation, instead of giving us the sifted results in their bearing on the life and character of his subject, whether for help or hinderance. We are blinded with the dust of old papers ransacked by Mr. Masson to find out that they have no relation whatever to his hero. He had

been wise if he had kept constantly in view what Milton himself says of those who gathered up personal traditions concerning the Apostles: "With less fervency was studied what Saint Paul or Saint John had written than was listened to one that could say, 'Here he taught, here he stood, this was his stature, and thus he went habited; and O, happy this house that harbored him, and that cold stone whereon he rested, this village where he wrought such a miracle.' . . . Thus while all their thoughts were poured out upon circumstances and the gazing after such men as had sat at table with the Apostles, . . . by this means they lost their time and truanted on the fundamental grounds of saving knowledge, as was seen shortly in their writings." Mr. Masson has so *poured out his mind upon circumstances*, that his work reminds us of Allston's picture of Elijah in the Wilderness, where a good deal of research at last enables us to guess at the prophet absconded like a conundrum in the landscape where the very ravens could scarce find him out. The figure of Milton becomes but a speck on the enormous canvas crowded with the scenery through which he may by any possibility be conjectured to have passed. We will cite a single example of the desperate straits to which Mr. Masson is reduced in order to hitch Milton on to his own biography. He devotes the first chapter of his Second Book to the meeting of the Long Parliament. "Already," he tells us, "in the earlier part of the day, the Commons had gone through the ceremony of hearing the writ for the Parliament read, and the names of the members that had been returned called over by Thomas Wyllys, Esq., the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery. His deputy, *Agar, Milton's brother-in-law, may have been in attendance on such an occasion.* During the preceding month or two, at all events, Agar and his subordinates in the Crown Office had been unusually busy with the issue of the writs and with the other work connected with the opening of Parliament." (Vol. II. p. 150.) Mr. Masson's resolute "at all events" is very amusing. Meanwhile

"The hungry sheep look up and are not fed."

Augustin Thierry has a great deal to answer for, if to him we owe the modern fashion of writing history picturesquely. At least his method leads to most unhappy results when essayed by men to whom nature has denied a sense of what the picturesque really is. The historical picturesque does not consist, in truth, of costume and similar accessaries, but in the grouping, attitude, and expression of the figures, caught when they are unconscious that the artist is sketching them. The moment they are posed for a composition, unless by a man of genius, the life has gone out of them. In the hands of an inferior artist, who fancies that imagination is something to be squeezed out of

color-tubes, the past becomes a phantasmagoria of jackboots, doublets, and flap-hats, the mere property-room of a deserted theatre, as if the life had been scenical and illusory, the world an unreal thing that vanished with the foot-lights. It is the power of catching the actors in great events at unawares that makes the glimpses given us by contemporaries so vivid and precious. And St. Simon, one of the great masters of the picturesque, lets us into the secret of his art when he tells us how, in that wonderful scene of the death of *Monsieur*, he saw, "*du premier coup d'œil vivement porté, tout ce qui leur échappoit et tout ce qui les accableroit.*" It is the gift of producing this reality that almost makes us blush, as if we had been caught peeping through a keyhole and had surprised secrets to which we had no right,—it is this only that can justify the pictorial method of narration. Mr. Carlyle has this power of contemporizing himself with bygone times, he cheats us to

"Play with our fancies and believe we see";

but we find the *tableaux vivants* of the apprentices who "deal in his command without his power," and who compel us to work very hard indeed with our fancies, rather wearisome. The effort of weaker arms to shoot with his mighty bow has filled the air of recent literature with more than enough fruitless twanging.

Mr. Masson's style, at best cumbrous, becomes intolerably awkward when he strives to make up for the want of St. Simon's *premier coup d'œil* by impertinent details of what we must call the pseudo-dramatic kind. For example, does Hall profess to have traced Milton from the University to a "suburb sink" of London? Mr. Masson fancies he hears Milton saying to himself, "A suburb sink! has Hall or his son taken the trouble to walk all the way down to Aldergate here, to peep up the entry where I live, and so have an exact notion of my whereabouts? There has been plague in the neighborhood certainly; and I hope Jane Yates had my doorstep tidy for the visit." Does Milton, answering Hall's innuendo that he was courting the graces of a rich widow, tell us that he would rather "choose a virgin of mean fortunes honestly bred"? Mr. Masson forthwith breaks forth in a paroxysm of what we suppose to be picturesqueness in this wise: "What have we here? Surely nothing less, if we choose so to construe it, than a marriage-advertisement! Ho, all ye virgins of England (widows need not apply), here is an opportunity such as seldom occurs: a bachelor, unattached; age, thirty-three years and three or four months; height [Milton, by the way, would have said *high*], middle or a little less; personal appearance unusually handsome, with fair complexion and light auburn hair; circumstances independent; tastes

intellectual and decidedly musical; principles Root-and-Branch! Was there already any young maiden in whose bosom, had such an advertisement come in her way, it would have raised a conscious flutter? If so, did she live near Oxford?" If there *is* anything worse than an unimaginative man trying to write imaginatively, it is a heavy man when he fancies he is being facetious. He tramples out the last spark of cheerfulness with the broad damp foot of a hippopotamus.

We are no advocates for what is called the dignity of history, when it means, as it too often does, that dulness has a right of sanctuary in gravity. Too well do we recall the sorrows of our youth, when we were shipped in search of knowledge on the long Johnsonian swell of the last century, favorable to anything but the calm digestion of historic truth. We had even then an uneasy suspicion, which has ripened into certainty, that thoughts were never draped in long skirts like babies, if they were strong enough to go alone. But surely there should be such a thing as good taste, above all a sense of self-respect, in the historian himself, that should not allow him to play any tricks with the dignity of his subject. A halo of sacredness has hitherto invested the figure of Milton, and our image of him has dwelt securely in ideal remoteness from the vulgarities of life. No diaries, no private letters, remain to give the idle curiosity of after-times the right to force itself on the hallowed seclusions of his reserve. That a man whose familiar epistles were written in the language of Cicero, whose sense of personal dignity was so great that, when called on in self-defence to speak of himself, he always does it with an epical stateliness of phrase, and whose self-respect even in youth was so profound that it resembles the reverence paid by other men to a far-off and idealized character,—that he should be treated in this offhand familiar fashion by his biographer seems to us a kind of desecration, a violation of good manners no less than of the laws of biographic art. Better the surly injustice of Johnson than such presumptuous friendship as this. Let the seventeenth century, at least, be kept sacred from the insupportable foot of the interviewer!

But Mr. Masson, in his desire to be (shall we say) idiomatic, can do something worse than what we have hitherto quoted. He can be even vulgar. Discussing the motives of Milton's first marriage, he says, "Did he come seeking his 500 *l*, and did Mrs. Powell *heave a daughter at him?*" We have heard of a woman throwing herself at a man's head, and the image is a somewhat violent one; but what is this to Mr. Masson's improvement on it? It has been sometimes affirmed that the fitness of an image may be tested by trying whether a picture could be made of it or not. Mr. Masson has certainly offered a new

and striking subject to the historical school of British art. A little further on, speaking of Mary Powell, he says, "We have no portrait of her, nor any account of her appearance; but on the usual rule of the elective affinities of opposites, Milton being fair, *we will vote her to have been dark-haired.*" We need say nothing of the good taste of this sentence, but its absurdity is heightened by the fact that Mr. Masson himself had left us in doubt whether the match was one of convenience or inclination. We know not how it may be with other readers, but for ourselves we always resent this hail-fellow-well-met manner with its jaunty "*we will vote.*" In some cases, Mr. Masson's indecorums in respect of style may possibly be accounted for as attempts at humor by one who has an imperfect notion of its ingredients. In such experiments, to judge by the effect, the pensive element of the compound enters in too large an excess over the hilarious. Whether we have hit upon the true explanation, or whether the cause lie not rather in a besetting velleity of the picturesque and vivid, we shall leave the reader to judge by an example or two. In the manuscript copy of Milton's sonnet in which he claims for his own house the immunity which the memory of Pindar and Euripides secured for other walls, the title had originally been, "*On his Door when the City expected an Assault.*" Milton has drawn a line through this and substituted "*When the Assault was intended to the City.*" Mr. Masson fancies "a mood of jest or semi-jest in the whole affair"; but we think rather that Milton's quiet assumption of equality with two such famous poets was as seriously characteristic as Dante's ranking himself *sesto tra cotanto senno*. Mr. Masson takes advantage of the obliterated title to imagine one of Prince Rupert's troopers entering the poet's study and finding some of his "Anti-Episcopal pamphlets that had been left lying about inadvertently. 'Oho!' the Cavalier Captain might then have said, 'Pindar and Euripides are all very well, by G—! I've been at college myself; and when I meet a gentleman and scholar, I hope I know how to treat him; but neither Pindar nor Euripides ever wrote pamphlets against the Church of England, by G—! It won't do, Mr. Milton!'" This, we suppose, is Mr. Masson's way of being funny and dramatic at the same time. We are shocked with this barbarous dissonance. Could not the Muse defend his son? Again, when Charles I., at Edinburgh, in the autumn and winter of 1641, fills the vacant English sees, we are told, "It was more than an insult; it was a sarcasm! It was as if the King, while giving Alexander Henderson his hand to kiss, had winked his royal eye over that reverend Presbyterian's back!" Now we can conceive Charles II. winking when he took the Solemn League and Covenant, but never his father under any circumstances. He may have been, and we

believe he was, a bad king, but surely we may take Marvell's word for it, that

"He nothing common did or mean,"

upon any of the "memorable scenes" of his life. The image is, therefore, out of all imaginative keeping, and vulgarizes the chief personage in a grand historical tragedy, who, if not a great, was at least a decorous actor. But Mr. Masson can do worse than this. Speaking of a Mrs. Katherine Chidley, who wrote in defence of the Independents against Thomas Edwards, he says, "People wondered who this she-Brownist, Katherine Chidley, was, and did not quite lose their interest in her when they found that she was an oldish woman, and a member of some hole-and-corner congregation in London. Indeed, *she put her nails into Mr. Edwards with some effect.*" Why did he not say at once, after the good old fashion, that she "set her ten commandments in his face"? In another place he speaks of "Satan standing with his *staff* around him." Mr. Masson's style, a little Robertsonian at best, naturally grows worse when forced to condescend to every-day matters. He can no more dismount and walk than the man in armor on a Lord Mayor's day. "It (Aldersgate Street) stretches away northwards a full fourth of a mile as one continuous thoroughfare, until, crossed by Long Lane and the Barbican, it parts with the name of Aldersgate Street, and, under the new names of Goswell Street and Goswell Road, *completes its tendency towards the suburbs* and fields about Islington." What a noble work might not the Directory be if composed on this scale! The imagination even of an alderman might well be lost in that full quarter of a mile of continuous thoroughfare. Mr. Masson is very great in these passages of civic grandeur; but he is more surprising, on the whole, where he has an image to deal with. Speaking of Milton's "two-handed engine" in Lycidas, he says: "May not Milton, whatever else he meant, have meant a coming English Parliament with its two Houses? Whatever he meant, his prophecy had come true. As he sat among his books in Aldersgate Street, the two-handed engine at the door of the English Church was on the swing. Once, twice, thrice, it had swept its arcs to gather energy; now it was on the backmost poise, and the blow was to descend." We cannot help wishing that Mr. Masson would try his hand on the tenth horn of the beast in Revelation, or on the time and half a time of Daniel. There is something so consoling to a prophet in being told that, no matter what he meant, his prophecy had come true, and that he might mean "whatever else" he pleased, so long as he *may* have meant what we choose to think he did, reasoning backward from the assumed fulfilment! But we think we detect in Mr. Masson's "swept its arcs" a

little of that prophetic hedging in vagueness to which he allows so generous a latitude. How if the "two-handed engine," after all, were a broom (or besom, to be more dignified),

"Sweeping — vehemently sweeping,
No pause admitted, no design avowed,"

like that wielded by the awful shape which Dion the Syracusan saw? We make the suggestion modestly, though somewhat encouraged by Mr. Masson's system of exegesis, which reminds one of the casuists' doctrine of probables, in virtue of which a man may be *probabiliter obligatus* and *probabiliter deobligatus* at the same time. But perhaps the most remarkable instance of Mr. Masson's figures of speech is where we are told that the king might have established a *bona fide* government "by giving public ascendancy to the popular or Parliamentary element in his Council, and inducing the old leaven in it either to accept the new policy, or to withdraw and become inactive." There is something consoling in the thought that yeast should be accessible to moral suasion. It is really too bad that bread should ever be heavy for want of such an appeal to its moral sense as should "induce it to accept the new policy." Of Mr. Masson's unhappy infection with the *vivid* style we will give an instance or two in justification of our charge against him in that particular. He says of Loudon that "he was committed to the Tower, where for more than two months he lay, with as near a prospect as ever prisoner had of a chop with the executioner's axe on a scaffold on Tower Hill." We may be over-fastidious, but the word "chop" offends our ears with its coarseness, or if that be too strong, has certainly the unpleasant effect of an emphasis unduly placed. Old Auchinleck's saying of Cromwell, that "he gard kings ken they had a lith in their necks," is a good example of really vivid phrase, suggesting the axe and the block, and giving one of those dreadful hints to the imagination which are more powerful than any amount of detail, and whose skilful use is the only magic employed by the masters of truly picturesque writing. The sentence we have just quoted will serve also as an example of that tendency to *surplusage* which adds to the bulk of Mr. Masson's sentences at the cost of their effectiveness. If he had said simply "chop on Tower Hill" (if chop there must be), it had been quite enough, for we all know that the executioner's axe and the scaffold are implied in it. Once more, and we have done with the least agreeable part of our business. Mr. Masson, after telling over again the story of Strafford with needless length of detail, ends thus: "On Wednesday, the 12th of May, that proud curly head, the casket of that brain of power, rolled on the scaffold of Tower Hill." Why curly? Surely it is here a ludicrous impertinence. This careful

thrusting forward of outward and unmeaning particulars, in the hope of giving that reality to a picture which genius only has the art to do, is becoming a weariness in modern descriptive writing. It reminds one of the Mrs. Jarley expedient of dressing the waxen effigies of murderers in the very clothes they wore when they did the deed, or with the real halter round their necks wherewith they expiated it. It is probably very effective with the torpid sensibilities of the class who look upon wax figures as works of art. True imaginative power works with other material. Lady Macbeth striving to wash away from her hands the damned spot that is all the more there to the mind of the spectator because it is not there at all, is a type of the methods it employs and the intensity of their action.

Having discharged our duty in regard to Mr. Masson's faults of manner, which we should not have dwelt on so long had they not greatly marred our enjoyment in the reading, and were they not the ear-mark of a school which has become unhappily numerous, we turn to a consideration of his work as a whole. We think he made a mistake in his very plan, or else was guilty of a misnomer in his title. His book is not so much a life of Milton as a collection of materials out of which a careful reader may sift the main facts of the poet's biography. His passion for minute detail is only to be equalled by his diffuseness on points mainly if not altogether irrelevant. He gives us a Survey of British Literature, occupying one hundred and twenty-eight pages of his first volume, written in the main with good judgment, and giving the average critical opinion of nearly every writer, great and small, who was in any sense a contemporary of Milton. We have no doubt all this would be serviceable and interesting to Mr. Masson's classes in Edinburgh University, and we congratulate them on having so competent a teacher; but what it has to do with Milton, unless in the case of such authors as may be shown to have influenced his style or turn of thought, we do not clearly see. Most readers of a *Life of Milton* may be presumed to have some knowledge of the general literary history of the time, or at any rate to have the means of acquiring it, and Milton's manner (his style was his own) was very little affected by any of the English poets, with the single exception, in his earlier poems, of George Wither. Mr. Masson also has something to say about everybody, from Wentworth to the obscurest Brownist fanatic who was so much as heard of in England during Milton's lifetime. If this theory of a biographer's duty should hold, our grandchildren may expect to see "A Life of Thackeray, or who was who in England, France, and Germany during the first Half of the Nineteenth Century." These digressions of Mr. Masson's from

what should have been his main topic (he always seems somehow to be "completing his tendency towards the suburbs" of his subject), give him an uneasy feeling that he must get Milton in somehow or other at intervals, if it were only to remind the reader that he has a certain connection with the book. He is eager even to discuss a mere hypothesis, even an untenable one, if it will only increase the number of pages devoted specially to Milton, and thus lessen the apparent disproportion between the historical and the biographical matter. Milton tells us that his morning wont had been "to read good authors, or cause them to be read, till the attention be weary, or memory have his full fraught; then with useful and generous labors preserving the body's health and hardiness, to render lightsome, clear, and not lumpish obedience to the mind, to the cause of religion and our country's liberty when it shall require firm hearts in sound bodies to stand and cover their stations rather than see the ruin of our Protestantism and the enforcement of a slavish life." Mr. Masson snatches at the hint: "This is interesting"; he says, "Milton, it seems, has for some time been practising drill! The City Artillery Ground was near. . . . Did Milton among others make a habit of going there of mornings? Of this more hereafter." When Mr. Masson returns to the subject he speaks of Milton's "all but positive statement . . . that in the spring of 1642, or a few months before the breaking out of the Civil War, he was in the habit of spending a part of each day *in military exercise somewhere not far from his house in Aldersgate Street*." What he puts by way of query on page 402 has become downright certainty seventy-nine pages further on. The passage from Milton's tract makes no "statement" of the kind it pleases Mr. Masson to assume. It is merely a Miltonian way of saying that he took regular exercise, because he believed that moral no less than physical courage demanded a sound body. And what proof does Mr. Masson bring to confirm his theory? Nothing more nor less than two or three passages in *Paradise Lost*, of which we shall quote only so much as is essential to his argument: —

"And now

Advanced in view they stand, a horrid front
Of dreadful length and dazzling arms, in guise
Of warriors old with *ordered* spear and shield,
Awaiting what command their mighty chief
Had to impose." — B. i. 562–567.

Mr. Masson assures us that "there are touches in this description (as, for example, the *ordering* of arms at the moment of halt, and without word of command) too exact and technical to have occurred to a mere civilian. Again, at the same review . . .

‘ He now prepared
To speak ; whereat their doubled ranks they bend
From wing to wing, and half enclose him round
With all his peers ; *attention* held them mute.’—*Ib.*, 615–618.

To the present day this is the very process, or one of the processes, when a commander wishes to address his men. They wheel inward and stand at ‘attention.’” But his main argument is the phrase “*ported spears*,” in Book Fourth, on which he has an interesting and valuable comment. He argues the matter through a dozen pages or more, seeking to prove that Milton *must* have had some practical experience of military drill. We confess that we have great doubt whether “attention” and “ordered” in the passages cited have any other than their ordinary meaning, and Milton could never have looked on at the pike-exercise without learning what “ported” meant. But, be this as it may, we will venture to assert that there was not a boy in New England, forty years ago, who did not know more of the manual than is implied in Milton’s use of these terms. Mr. Masson’s object in proving Milton to have been a proficient in these martial exercises is to increase our wonder at his not entering the army. “If there was any man in England of whom one might surely have expected that he would be in arms among the Parliamentarians,” he says, “that man was Milton.” Milton may have had many an impulse to turn soldier, as all men must in such times, but we do not believe that he ever seriously intended it. Nor is it any matter of reproach that he did not. It is plain, from his works, that he believed himself very early set apart and consecrated for tasks of a very different kind, for services demanding as much self-sacrifice and of more enduring result. We have no manner of doubt that he, like Dante, believed himself divinely inspired with what he had to utter, and, if so, why not also divinely guided in what he should do or leave undone? Milton wielded in the cause he loved a weapon far more effective than a sword.

Mr. Masson’s volumes contain a great deal of very valuable matter, whatever we may think of its bearing upon the life of Milton. The chapters devoted to Scottish affairs are particularly interesting to a student of the Great Rebellion, its causes and concomitants. His analyses of the two armies, of the Parliament, and the Westminster Assembly, are sensible additions to our knowledge. A too painful thoroughness, indeed, is the criticism we should make on his work as a biography. Even as a history, we might complain that it confuses by the multiplicity of its details, while it wearies by want of continuity. Mr. Masson lacks the skill of an accomplished story-teller. A fact is to him a fact, never mind how unessential, and he misses the breadth

of truth in his devotion to accuracy. The very order of his title-page, "The Life of Milton narrated in connection with the political, ecclesiastical, and literary history of his time," shows, we think, a misconception of the true nature of his subject. Milton's chief importance, we might say his only importance, is a literary one. His place is fixed as the most classical of our poets.

Neither in politics nor theology did Milton leave any distinguishable trace on the thought of his time or in the history of opinion. In both these lines of his activity circumstances forced upon him the position of a controversialist whose aims and results are by the necessity of the case desultory and ephemeral. Hooker before him and Hobbes after him had a far firmer grasp of fundamental principles than he. His studies in these matters were perfunctory and occasional, and his opinions were heated to the temper of the times and shaped by the instant exigencies of the forum, instead of being the slow result of a deliberate judgment enlightened by intellectual sympathy with his subject. His interest was rather in the occasion than the matter of the controversy. No aphorisms of political science are to be gleaned from his writings as from those of Burke. The *Areopagitica* might seem an exception, but that also is a plea rather than an argument, and his interest in the question is not one of abstract principle, but of personal relation to himself. He was far more rhetorician than thinker. The sonorous amplitude of his style was better fitted to persuade the passions than to convince the reason. The only passages from his prose that may be said to have survived are emotional, not argumentative, or they have lived in virtue of their figurative beauty, not their weight of thought. Milton's power lay in dilation. Touched by him, the simplest image, the most obvious thought

"Dilated stood
Like Teneriffe or Atlas
. . . . nor wanted in his grasp
What *seemed* both spear and shield."

But the thin stiletto of Macchiavelli is a more effective weapon than these fantastic arms of his. He had not the secret of compression that properly belongs to the political thinker, on whom, as Hazlitt said of himself, "nothing but abstract ideas make any impression." Almost every aphoristic phrase that he has made current is borrowed from some one of the classics, like his famous

"License they mean when they cry liberty,"

from Tacitus. This is no reproach to him so far as his true function, that of poet, was concerned. It is his peculiar glory that literature was

with him purely an art, an end and not a means. Of his political work he has himself told us, "I should not choose this manner of writing, wherein, knowing myself inferior to myself (led by the genial power of nature to another task), I have the use, as I may account, but of my left hand."

Mr. Masson has given an excellent analysis of these writings, selecting with great judgment the salient passages, which have an air of blank verse thinly disguised as prose, like some of the corrupted passages of Shakespeare. We are particularly thankful to him for his extracts from the pamphlets written against Milton, especially for such as contain criticisms on his style. It is not a little interesting to see the most stately of poets reproached for his use of vulgarisms and low words. We seem to get a glimpse of the schooling of his "choiceful sense" to that nicety which could not be content till it had made his native tongue "search all her coffers round." We cannot help thinking also that his practice in prose, especially in the long involutions of Latin periods, helped him to give that variety of pause and that majestic harmony to his blank verse which have made it so unapproachably his own. Wordsworth, at his finest, has, perhaps come nearest to it, but with how long an interval! Bryant has not seldom attained to its serene dignity, but never emulates its pomp. Keats has caught something of its "large utterance," but altogether fails of its nervous severity of phrase. Cowper's muse (that moved with such graceful ease in slippers) becomes stiff when she buckles on her feet the cothurnus of Milton. Thomson grows tumid wherever he assays the grandiosity of his model. It is instructive to get any glimpse of the slow processes by which Milton arrived at that classicism which sets him apart from, if not above, all our other poets.

In gathering up the impressions made upon us by Mr. Masson's work as a whole, we are inclined rather to regret his copiousness for his sake than our own. The several parts, though disproportionate, are valuable, his research has been conscientious, and he has given us better means of understanding Milton's time than we possessed before. But how is it about Milton himself? Here was a chance, it seems to us, for a fine bit of portrait-painting. There is hardly a more stately figure in literary history than Milton's; no life in some of its aspects more tragical, except Dante's. In both these great poets, more than in any others, the character of the men makes part of the singular impressiveness of what they wrote and of its vitality with after-times. In them the man somehow overtops the author. The works of both are full of autobiographical confidences. Like Dante, Milton became a party by himself. He stands out in marked and solitary individuality,

apart from the great movement of the Civil War, apart from the supine acquiescence of the Restoration, a self-opinionated, unforgiving, and unforgetting man. Very much alive he certainly was in his day. Has Mr. Masson made him alive to us again? We fear not. At the same time, while we cannot praise either the style or the method of Mr. Masson's work, we cannot refuse to be grateful for it. It is not so much a book for the ordinary reader of biography as for the student, and will be more likely to find its place on the library-shelf than the centre-table. It does not in any sense belong to light literature, but demands all the muscle of the trained and vigorous reader. "Truly, in respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect that it is a *poet's* life it is naught."

7. — *Latin Grammar*. By HENRY JOHN ROBY. *Sounds, Inflexions, Word-formation*. London: Macmillan & Co. 1871.

THE publication of this book is an event in the history of the study of Latin. The marvel is that it has been so long delayed. Certainly the advance guard of Latin scholars is very far ahead of the main body; for though it is more than fifty years since Bopp's Conjugations-System and forty since his Comparative Grammar appeared, this book seems to be the first full official information that has reached the rank and file, at least in the English-speaking division. The youth of to-day learn Latin precisely on the same principles as if Bopp had never lived, though he introduced Comparative Grammar to throw light upon all language, and made known the perfect system of Indian grammar which dates back before any one had ever thought of teaching Greek even among the Greeks themselves. This is certainly not owing to the apathy of teachers, but to the fact that in Latin at least the results of comparative grammar have not been given in an accessible form. It is too much to expect of the lay brethren that they should master three large volumes of Bopp, one immense volume of Schleicher written in a phonetic dialect, two of Corssen and twenty more of Kuhn's *Zeitschrift*, to say nothing of innumerable *Beiträge*, in order to correct the method and the errors of their Latin grammars. And we are persuaded that this book will be eagerly sought for and profitably studied, and that the scientific study of language will be greatly advanced thereby. Moreover, a want has long been felt for a book embodying the results of the latest criticism, which are for the most part concealed in "*Opuscula*" and in such works as Neue's "*Formenlehre*," containing, as our author pathetically says, "thirteen hundred closely printed pages with-